

USS AZ_OHC_#356_Robert Sheeks_06-14-94

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[BEGIN VIDEO]

[NON-INTERVIEW]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The history interview was conducted on June 14, 1994, at approximately 9:00 a.m., by the National Parks Service, American Memorial Park, in cooperation with the Marianas Cable Vision. The subject is Robert Sheeks, USMC (Retired) Major, Veteran of the Marianas Campaign. The interviewer is Daniel Martinez, Historian, USS Arizona Memorial.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well good morning Robert. How are you?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Good morning Daniel.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And I understand, I'll call you, "Bob" from now on, alright?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Do people call you Daniel or Dan?

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Daniel's fine, [OVERLAPPING] or whatever you feel comfortable with.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Okay. "Daniel."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: For the record, could you please state your full name, and could you spell that last name for us.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes. My full name is Robert; middle name is Bruce (I guess, "B," the initial); Sheeks—unusual name. It's S-H-double E-K-S.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And what's the cultural/ethnic background there?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, my father's family came from Holland; and I think when they immigrated to the U. S., probably, the immigration officials spelled it any old way. And I think it was originally something like, [SOUNDS LIKE] "Van Schecht."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I see.

ROBERT SHEEKS: So it came out that way.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And where were you born?

ROBERT SHEEKS: I happened to be born in Shanghai, China. My father had gone out as a businessman, originally, with the Ford Motor Company; and, I grew up and

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went to the American School in Shanghai. I left there at age 13, and went to high schools and college in the U. S.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And what date were you born on? What was the full date?

ROBERT SHEEKS: A long time ago! Ha, ha, ha. It was April 8, 1922; so, I'm 72 years old, and it was 50 years ago (at age 22) that I first visited Saipan.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What were your parents' names?

ROBERT SHEEKS: My father's name was George Lamar Sheeks, and my mother's name was Mollie Harris Gordon Sheeks.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And, did you have any brothers and sisters?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes. I have one brother still living. He's two years older. His name is George Harris Sheeks, and he lives in San Diego, California.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So there was just two in your family—two boys?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, just two kids.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And so, you mother and father passed away?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, my mother passed away in Shanghai—is buried there, and my father died some years later, in Spokane, Washington, where I'd gone to high school.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How long did they live?

ROBERT SHEEKS: They were elderly as parents (when my brother and I were born), and my father lived to be in his late 80's. Mother died, I think, when she was in her late 40's. I went to visit her in the cemetery in Shanghai a few years ago, and it's been turned into a very nice park. The cemetery is gone.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Is that right?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So where's your mother's gravesite—somewhere in that park?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, yes, it was in that park; but, when the communists took over, [OVERLAPPING] ...

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: Uh huh.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... they removed many Chinese graves from all over the whole countryside, because land is short. And this was a foreign cemetery, so they certainly weren't going to keep it; but, the trees are there, but they've become huge and giant, and it's a very nice park, so I felt somewhat relieved that (even though the cemetery is gone) [OVERLAPPING] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Your mom's resting in beautiful place. [OVERLAPPING]

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, in a beautiful park.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You say you grew in Shanghai. You grew up ... Would you call that your "home town?"

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes. I like to think of it as a home town. It's a very fascinating, dynamic city, and I think it's going to become the leading city in China again one of these days. And, I stayed interested in Chinese; kept up the language; and later studied Chinese in college, and I've kept it up. So I still sort of think of my second home as being Shanghai, but really am a Californian—Marin County.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So when you left Shanghai, you settled up near San Francisco?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, it was not that direct. I went to school in the East Coast of the U. S.; and then, I was away during the war—spent a lot of time living in the Pacific—but, when I did establish a home base, it was in California.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You went to grammar school, then, at the American School in Shanghai?

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: From there, you left; and where did you go to school?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, we first went to Southern California, where my father had a farm property. We later moved to Washington State, where he had another farm property, and I went to high school in Washington State; graduated from high school in Spokane, Washington. And I had joined the Marine Corps Reserve, because I had

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been very impressed with the 4th Marines in Shanghai, which was a famous battalion.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: China Marines?

ROBERT SHEEKS: China Marines, yeah; and oh, they were so handsome, you know; and the parades, and so, I had it in mind to—maybe I would like to be a Marine. And as fate would have it, I joined the Marine Reserve in Spokane, and served one summer in Bremerton, Washington. In fact, I had joined the active reserve when I graduated from high school. And I thought I was going to military service. But much to my amazement, I got a scholarship to Harvard. I'd taken the Harvard Scholarship exams, and I was convinced that I'd failed. I knew I had failed. There were two days of hellish exams, so I just gave up. I put it out of my mind. And some teachers had urged me to take these exams. And I was on duty at Bremerton Navy yard when I got this announcement from Harvard say, that if I were interested still, they would like me to come, and they were providing a scholarship. So, I went off to Harvard instead—a conditional release from the Marines, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: From the Reserve Unit?

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... from the Reserve Unit.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You must have been a bright, young fellow to make it to Harvard?

ROBERT SHEEKS: I never thought so, but I guess I must have something right. Ha, ha, ha.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Ha, ha. Were you there at the time Jack Kennedy was there?

ROBERT SHEEKS: No. I think that he was ... No, I don't ... [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You don't recall?

ROBERT SHEEKS: No, I don't ... I don't ... [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You don't recall him being there [OVERLAPPING] ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: No, I don't recall. [OVERLAPPING]

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: He was there in the late 30's.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, I ... [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: He used to say, "Haaaavard."

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right. Ha, ha, ha. You've got it exactly right. I went there in 1940, okay—the fall of 1940.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I think he was out by then, I think.

ROBERT SHEEKS: I lived in the same room that Franklin D. Roosevelt had occupied.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Is that right? You boarded in the same room?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, they put the names who'd lived in these rooms, you see, and so ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Quite the tradition.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah. It's kind of a funny tradition.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So, "the clouds of war are gathering" while you're at school?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Absolutely. In fact there'd been declared a limited emergency, and reserves were being called-up. That's what would have happened to me if I weren't in college. And the second summer, when I was a sophomore, I had gone back to Spokane, and had taken an Army Air Corps (we didn't have an Air Force at the time) Reserve program, and got a private pilot's license, and was in the Army Air Corps Reserve. And when Pearl Harbor occurred, I was interviewed, suddenly, by a Colonel Heinmarsh from—I mean, "Commander" Heinmarsh—Navy, from Washington, D. C., because he knew that I had a Chinese- and some Japanese-language background, and they were "scraping the bottom of the barrel" for anybody who could go into Language Services.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Now when you were at Harvard, did you carry-on that education in language—Japanese language?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, I did.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Would it be fair to say that you perfected it?

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ROBERT SHEEKS: No, no, no, but far from it. When I was recruited, right after Pearl Harbor, they sent us to Berkeley, California. There was a school Harbor, which was transferred ... The people transferred over—the Navy Language School—to California. And when the Japanese were evacuated from California to the Inland, I was moved to Boulder, Colorado. And I finished the Navy language training there—Intelligence and Japanese language—but I'd said that I wanted to be commissioned in the Marine Corps, rather than the Navy. So that's how I got to become a Marine officer.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So they commissioned you as a Lieutenant?

ROBERT SHEEKS: A Second Lieutenant. I'd been a Private in the Reserve; and after some college and Japanese Navy language training, then I was commissioned—went to San Diego, and was shipped-out to the Pacific.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you have to re-do Basic Training?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Some, yes. There was some Basic Training at Camp Pendleton, and at a place called Green's Farm, near San Diego. And this was one of these "rush training programs."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Now, the Marines, that's a pretty tough outfit to ... That training's pretty rigorous.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, it was very tough, and they made a point of it. You ended up hating a lot of people—not only the enemy. Ha, ha, ha.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: With Pearl Harbor broken out, and prior to that, you must have kept a perspective eye on what was happening in China. Did you have kind-of an interpretation of how you felt the "world scene" was going to unfold prior to Pearl Harbor? Did Pearl Harbor come as sort of a surprise to you, or ...?

ROBERT SHEEKS: It did come as a surprise, but I was in Shanghai in 1932. I left there in '35, at the age of 13. But the Japanese invaded Manchuria and they also

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invaded Shanghai at that time. And I personally saw the evidence of war and their atrocities. They were a very, very cruel militaristic nation at the time.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What kind of ... You saw some atrocities that ... ?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well I didn't go and watch any atrocities being committed, but there were photographs, at the time, that were published by the newspapers and journals; and, the Japanese did all kinds of things to terrify the Chinese, to keep them from resisting. And all kinds of needless things. They would tie-up a whole bunch of people and douse them with fuel—you know, gasoline—and ignite them; or, they would shoot a whole lot of people needlessly, and so I had a tremendous hatred for the Japanese. And curiously, when I started studying Japanese language, and learning—our teachers were Nisei, and I learned more about Japan—my terrible, youthful hatred sort of subsided, and I got a much better perspective.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Some of these Japanese officers that did this were an aberration of some of the Japanese culture?

ROBERT SHEEKS: I think so. But they did have, for many years, a militaristic country, just like Germany had turned militaristic, or Italy.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You know, during the 20's, this rise in militarism, [OVERLAPPING] ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... and this so-called, maybe overuse Code of Bushido?

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right. It was an aberration, but they had a lot of cultural roots on which to base it, you know, with the Samurai traditions.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Going back to the Edo period, and such?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh yes, that's right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: It must fascinate you to see the Japanese today, i.e., the Government—certain officials in their government—not all Japanese officials, but certain officials, refuting that history, and saying, "That didn't occur." It's almost as

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if the Holocaust—those people who say the Holocaust didn't occur, and these people fall from power. How do you feel about the Japanese—some of the Japanese' refusal to come to grips with their own history?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well that is all quite recent. It just happened, really, in recent months. It's come as a shock, because I've met a younger generation Japanese, and they seem to be an entirely different mentality.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How's that?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, they don't seem to be militaristic. They seem to be far less arrogant—far less convinced that they're superior, chosen people. They do look down, still, on Southeast Asians, and to some extent on the Chinese ...
[OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: There's a word for that, isn't there?

ROBERT SHEEKS: You mean the superiority complex? I suppose so. I'm not sure exactly what it would be, but they have a lot of not very polite words for the people in Southeast Asia, which, you, like, "na make mon"—lazy people. You know, and they feel that a lot of them sit for the papayas to fall, and that type of thing. Whereas, they regard themselves as extremely diligent and ... [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Industrious.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... industrious, which they are. But this recent event (was it the Foreign Minister, who ...) [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Japanese Minister.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... Japanese Minister) who tried to say that the Rape of Nan-King practically didn't occur; was greatly exaggerated; and so that is disturbing, because it sounds as though there's some resurgence of this old attitude.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: A lot of historians, like myself, are very concerned about this revisionism that crops up. And to me, it obviously creates barriers in which

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understanding between new nations are stymied by people's refusal to understand their own history.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Definitely. I'm concerned now that if things don't go well in Russia—things aren't going well—there'll be a revival of militaristic, you know ...
[OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: All because they're desperate, right?

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well, let's talk about "when people become desperate." The Pacific War was a tragic war for everyone involved, and the "cream of American youth" came out here re-take these islands, and you were part of that.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And you had a very unique role in all of that, in reading your papers and such, that I'd like to just, let's kind of capture what the uniqueness of your role was, because there isn't many of individuals that I've run across that were sent into the field specifically to do what you were told to do, and ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: I thought it was fascinating. I mean, "war is war," but the work that I was sent to do was extremely interesting. It got me into very interesting situations.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How did that all start, and what was the genesis of how you came to be part of ... What was this title, the Japanese Translator?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Japanese Language and Intelligence Officer, and I was with the 2nd Marine Division at the division headquarters, rather than the regimental or battalion level. And I was first sent out to New Zealand, and immediately transferred to New Caledonia, which was where Admiral Halsey's headquarters were. My first job was to interrogate prisoners from Guadalcanal. And that was very interesting. We also had some prisoners who were from sunken ships, which our Navy had sunk.

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: Do you remember the very first Japanese prisoner you interviewed? Do you remember that? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, I'd rather ... He was fairly routine, Army [INDISCERNABLE] Guadalcanal, but I'd rather mention something that I think is extremely interesting. It was not the first one—a little later. The ship which had taken me from Wellington, New Zealand to Numia and New Caledonia was sunk several days later by a combination of two of our U. S. patrol planes and a New Zealand Corvette. Twelve Japanese survived from this Japanese which sank our ship that I'd been on. Of these twelve, six—half of them—died overnight coming into Numia. The other six, I helped to interrogate. Turned out that they were on a submarine which was the largest submarine that had ever existed up until that time. We didn't know anything about it. It had a 180-man crew. It had an airplane—waterproof airplane/seaplane hangar on the deck, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: A big I-Class.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... a big I-Class, absolutely. And we didn't know about the [SOUNDS LIKE] ii-Go as I-Class submarines until then. And after I got a little information about them, a submarine senior officer (I think it was an Admiral from Pearl Harbor) flew out to direct the interrogation. And it turned out this was the submarine that had shelled the Santa Barbara oil storage area in California—first time that the U. S. was directly under attack.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right.

ROBERT SHEEKS: And so, he was a brilliant submarine officer, the American, and by finding out what was their route and their fueling stops, he was able to find out about where its sister ship, another I-Class, would be going. And a killer squadron was sent out by the U. S. Navy; intercepted it, and sank it somewhere out in the Pacific. That was fascinating [OVERLAPPIN] ...

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: That, I also [INDISCIPHERABLE] ... gives us information regarding a new weapon, but it also aids us in defeating the enemy at sea.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So, the intelligence part of this is extremely important.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah. Intelligence of various sorts played a role, and lack of it played an important role. We were a little short of it at Tarawa on tides and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Were you at Tarawa?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That must have been a terrible battle.

ROBERT SHEEKS: It was a terrible battle. It was only 76 hours, compared with [OVERLAPPING] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... what happened here at Saipan.

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: But could you give me a view of your role at Tarawa?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, I was, you know, a Japanese Language Officer with the 2nd Marine Division Headquarters. And that first day, things were not going well; and about mid-day, General Hermley, who was, I think, the Assistant Division Commander was sent in with a few people, including myself, and my job was to "catch some Japanese," ha, ha, and find out what's going on.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Catch some Japanese, ... [OVERLAPPING]

ROBERT SHEEKS: Ha, ha, ha. Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... on that small atoll, right?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah. Ha, ha, ha. And I mean they didn't [OVERLAPPING] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Our audience, perhaps, doesn't understand the humor in this. Why don't you explain what the humor in all of this is.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, "all Hell is breaking loose," and a lot of our people were being killed; and, it was quite a job just to survive. But when you're given the

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instruction very briefly, you know, “Go in and find some Japanese prisoners, and find out what they know.” So, we went in. Our boat was hit. We had to get out of it; get into a amphibian tractor, which picked us up. We went on to a pier, and I started crawling in under the pier, where a lot of “our kids” were wounded and dying, and were under the pier.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Now was this the first time you were actually under fire?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was that experience like?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, it was terrifying. But there’s only one thing more terrifying, is to let anybody else know that you’re terrified. So, had, ha ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Is that part of the Marine Corps training?

ROBERT SHEEKS: I think it’s “human;” that I suppose in China they’d call it “losing face,” you see; but you have to show that you’re brave, and so humor and all kinds of things help. [INDISCIPERABLE] people are wounded, you know, it’s a little different. And here I was a Lieutenant. I was brand new—“green as ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Twenty-two years old?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Twenty-one at the time, and “green as a leaf,” you know. And so when I was crawling under this pier, they’d say, “Lieutenant, Lieutenant, can you help me?” And so, you know I didn’t have medicine; I didn’t have enough morphine, cigarettes or any ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Are all these young guys—you’re even younger—are dying around you [OVERLAPPING] ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh yeah, yeah. They were seventeen, eight ... Some of them lied to get in, you know; but they were all incredibly brave, and everybody was scared as Hell, but you don’t want to show! [OVERLAPPING] You don’t want to show it to anybody.

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: I remember seeing that pier in photographs. I know what you're talking about—a long, narrow pier ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right. That's right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You crawled under there ... Did you accomplish your mission?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Not until the next day.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you spent the night on the beach?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, and it turned out that there was a great big metal float of some sort at the end of the pier, and we had gone right by it. But it turned out later that Japanese had got into it. It was a sniper, and he was firing at us from behind. Nobody knew where it was coming from. And finally, when he was located, of course, he was killed. But it was utter confusion, and we got very few prisoners, and some of them were actually not fully military. They were sort of labor battalion, and there were some Korean labor battalion. But we got a few, and I went back to Pearl Harbor with all of them onboard a ship, and interrogated them on the way back to Pearl Harbor. We got some useful information—mostly, about how they constructed the defenses and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: These defenses, which is, I think essential, in understanding Pacific War history, in many cases this was the first example of the Japanese using these type of defenses, and also the (correct me if I'm wrong, but I remember that the American forces were somewhat interested in the way that they triangulate fired, cross fired, and [INDISCERNABLE] ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: You're very well informed. You're the first person that I've run into in all these years who knows about this. One of the things that happened to me, ... I was sent to [SOUNDS LIKE] Sinkpak, Admiral Nimitz' headquarters at Pearl Harbor, to work on the defenses of these atolls and islands. And we had aerial photographs. But we took a lot of still photos of all the defenses at Tarawa. And they

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used many, many methods, and the triangulation crossfire; plus, using bunkers, concrete, and lots of coconut log ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... placements stapled together with huge steel staples and so forth. And I helped produce two volumes that were published there at Sinkpak on defense installations of the Japanese in the Pacific Islands—all illustrated, an lots of technical drawings as well, and aerial photographs. I don't know, ... I'd love to get a hold of a [OVERLAPPING] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I've run across some of these monographs now; but they do exist, and they're very interesting, because it was a kind of a ... They were classified, of course, ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... but they've now been declassified. These things exist, and they do exist in the archives.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh, I'll have to look them. I was working right next to a unit called, "FRUPAK"—Fleet Radio Unit, Pacific. And that's where they broke the Japanese Naval Code. And so, that's how we had some advantage at The Battle of Midway, and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right. I've interviewed some of those people.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh, oh really?

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You worked down in the building of the old Administration Building, ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... and Joe [SOUNDS LIKE] Roachford and that group [OVERLAPPING] ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... were all down there.

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ROBERT SHEEKS: Absolutely, there were all ... That's right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And when I was a young man, ... [OVERLAPPING]

ROBERT SHEEKS: You're still a young man [OVERLAPPING] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... twelve or thirteen, I went to a dinner for Joe Roachford, and I had no idea who he was. But Walter Lord had just come out with his book ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... which was called, "Incredible Victory," ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... and he featured him there.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And, of course, Joe's story is a tragic ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... naval story, ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... because what happened to him ... But he was later (after he passed away) honored the way he should have been.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That whole [INDECIPHERABLE] ... I've always wondered, if that Administration Building could tell stories, it would tell your story as well, about working on these books and volumes that were going to be so valuable to the oncoming campaigns.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So after Tarawa, your next action would be where?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, it was Saipan. We, from Tarawa, went back to Hawaii, and the division was based in Kamuela, but I was sent to work at Pearl. And we prepared leaflets to drop at Saipan, ...

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: Why don't you show us some of those leaflets. Can you just bring some of those up there.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, yeah. They seem very amateurish now, but, ha, ha, the best we could do at the time. We did all kinds of things, thinking that maybe we could soften-up the population—military or semi-military, at least.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Why don't you go through those, and just put one in front of you so the camera can see it, ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh yeah. Alright.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... like that, and why don't you talk about it for just a moment.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well this one has these two, big red characters superimposed—[SOUNDS LIKE] joishki, in Japanese; or [SOUNDS LIKE] changsha ub Chinese. It means, “common sense.” And what it's trying to do is to tell the Japanese, you know, use your commons sense, and understand what really is going on in the Pacific, and what's the situation in Japan, and don't think that there's any value in resisting and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And these leaflets were meant to be dropped over the enemy, right?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, and they were. They were dropped in Saipan. How many were picked up; and, they might have used some for toilet paper. They were terribly short of it. But any way, these were dropped by spotter plane. This one tried to attract people by saying, “military secret.”

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So, the red characters right there say military secret?

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right. [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [OVERLAPPING] Just like we advertise today, saying, “free automobile.” You know you're going to look at that ad, right?

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ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right. And so this is, "top secret military;" so they would pick it up and read it, and it would tell them what's really happening in Japan, and what they're not being told, and that the war really is being lost, and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That's interesting.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What's that one say?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well this one here is actually in Korean, and it's trying to disaffect the Koreans, many of whom were here ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: As laborers.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Laborers, and some were semi-military and so on—yeah, had been integrated into the military—and it refers to the Japanese occupation of Korea, and the Cairo Declaration, which said that Korea is going to be made an independent country, and appealed to Korean patriotism and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How interesting that you, too, as a historian yourself, we look back and we see that the issue with Korea is unresolved after 200 years, and it's on a lot of people's minds, even today.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Absolutely, but anyhow, they're not under the Japanese anymore, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: No.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... which—and this was appealing to independents. And I met a Korean doctor here yesterday, through [SOUNDS LIKE] Guy Gabaldin, and showed him this Korean one. He said, "Oh, the Korean government will be very interested to see this, because it refers to independence and so forth." So anyway, I'm going to give him a copy. This is another one which is a letter from ... This is not real. It's not a real letter. It's a letter purportedly by a Japanese prisoner in the U. S., "who had been in the Aleutians, and the Marshalls, and so on, and had been captured; and he

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was now in an American camp, being well treated, and so forth, and he's appealing to his comrades to [OVERLAPPING] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: To give up?

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... to give up, and it's pointless to resist, and they really are being treated ... A lot of other prisoners from different Japanese areas, and they're all being treated very well," you know, that kind of thing.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right.

ROBERT SHEEKS: I don't know how effective they were, but we had several other kinds. I don't have ... One of them was a "surrender pass," saying that if you turn this in, you'll get water and medicine and be well treated, and ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: These leaflets in Hawaii, in preparation for the invasion ... What else were you preparing?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Incidentally, these were printed by the Hawaii Advertiser.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Oh, the Honolulu Advertiser?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Honolulu Advertiser newspaper, and they were wonderful people. They never charged anything for it. They produced thousands and thousands of them; provide the paper and the printing services; and then, we took them back to Kamuela and got them ready for dropping by ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So the Honolulu Advertiser has a lot to do ..., has a connection to Saipan.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh, absolutely, and I wish I could remember the names of people, they were generous and [OVERLAPPING] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Oh I can get those for you, because I have the old newspapers that have all of the people, and worked in and ...[OVERLAPPING]

ROBERT SHEEKS: My goodness, yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... so we'll work on that a little.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, they contributed to the Saipan effort.

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well that's great.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So what else do you have there to show us?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, the preparatory stuff. We tried to help in every way we could. We produced a little thing about Saipan. Nobody knew much about Saipan, and ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So this was like a Fodor's Guide to Saipan?

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right, and this was distributed to all of the troops in the 2nd Marine Division after we had embarked and were on our way here, because it was still a top secret where we were going.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So the fellas would be lying on the decks of the invading craft, and be reading those. I've seen newsreels of that, what we're talking about?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah. That's right, and you know, it tells about that. And then, this was produced by the Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Area. Everything was abbreviated in those days. It had ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Acronyms, right?

ROBERT SHEEKS: "JICPOA," which is a funny name. And this one has some Japanese language phrases and Chamorro. This is a whole list of Chamorro vocabulary, Chamorro terms and so on, and maps of ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Map of the island?

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... of Saipan and Tinian and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Can you just hold that up right in front, and so we can get a good picture of that? Hold it right in front of you.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Right in front of me? Okay.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: There we go.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, this one is called, "Memo on the Marianas," and [INDISCERNABLE] simply called, "Saipan."

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: Wonderful.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah. Then we had all kinds of other stuff by way of preparation. This was called a Patrol Card, and this was ... [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Who would get one of those?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Everybody would get one. I don't know whether they (ha, ha) kept it; and that's just in case they ran into somebody, and ..., because we had not enough interpreters—very few.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How many interpreters were here on the island at the time of the invasion?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Really trained people, I'd say not more than a dozen. But then we had some kind of supplementary people who would know a little bit, and we prepared quite a bit of literature for them. But this was to for anybody. They could point to a phrase, saying, "location of others," you know, and then [OVERLAPPING] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So that ..

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... use sign language ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The scenario is that, "I'm a Marine out there, and I have my Patrol Card, and coming through my lines is somebody who wants to surrender. Obviously, I could pull that out and point that ..., [OVERLAPPING] point to the language ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: If you can let them read the Japanese or the Korean; and then when they get through reading that, you can ... You see it says here; it directs them to show you on the map or by some other way, where there are others hiding or in a point. And then it gives some instructions, "What not to do," you know, and ... Then it emphasizes, "Every prisoner turned in means a saving of American lives, time, and material." It was a hard job to convince our own people (ha, ha, ha).

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And I want to talk a little bit about that. It's obvious that a lot of the Marines that came here were trained to be very, very careful. There had been

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experiences prior to this in which Japanese appeared to be surrendering, and they have a hand grenade or perhaps a pistol or something, and the obvious thing is they're either gonna take their lives or take you with them.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: There were examples of that, ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... and so, how what was the reality of using the Patrol Card verses convincing Marines that nothing was going to happen to them, but ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, these Patrol Cards could also be used with civilians—anybody, I mean, men, women and children—they could know something. But the instances in which there was treachery were actually very few in number. You don't need many, because it makes such an impression. There were lots of stories. How true they are, I don't know. At Guadalcanal, I heard that there would be three soldiers coming to give up, and one of them would have a light machine gun strapped on his back. So when they got closer, that guy in the middle dropped down on his knees, and the other two operated the gun. Well, I've never found anybody who could tell me that they saw it or it happened, but it's a vital kind of an image that it's ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: A vivid image--a terrifying one.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ...a terrifying image. And then you hear about people who are carrying grenades, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... and as soon as you are helping them, they'd pull the pin on the grenade. Well, I think it was very rare, but you don't need many to make a vivid impression.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right. And those type of stories would circulate quite rapidly.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: Yeah, so it would cause fear. I know if I heard a story like that, I'd be fairly apprehensive.

ROBERT SHEEKS: And they were reinforced by the fact that a lot of people—I mean, compared to what we think might have happened—did commit suicide in one way or another. So, if they were willing to blow themselves up—commit suicide—it's easy to think they might try to take you with them.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well let's take this back to the invasion of Saipan. Prior to Saipan, obviously, you were briefing ..., you were being briefed about what was going to happen. Did you have a chance to brief members of the 2nd Marine Division of capturing prisoners, and how important that was?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh yes. That was really one of my main jobs, and I had to go around and lecture; and we had some slideshows, and we'd try to work them in before the movie (ha, ha), you know.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: There might not be much interest after Betty Grable's on the screen, right?

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right. And that, at least, kept them in their seats.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROBERT SHEEKS: And then, we had to be brief and then be gone, and often we were greeted with ..., I was greeted with some skepticism.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How did the Marines show skepticism?

ROBERT SHEEKS: "Okay, you take 'em. You wanna talk with 'em? You take 'em!" Ha, ha."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Okay, so you had banter going back-and-forth?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh, yeah. There was a give-and-take. They'd say, "Oh 'ta Hell with it," you know." And Marines have even a more colorful language than that. Ha, ha.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I understand they do.

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ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah. Ha, ha, ha.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When the invasion of Saipan takes place, where are you? Are you on the 1st of 2nd wave coming in, and what type of landing craft were you on?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh yes. No, I wasn't on the 1st or 2nd way. In fact, the 1st wave wasn't as bad as later ones, because ... I don't know why. I think the Japanese were letting the ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Kind of drawing them in?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Drawing them in. Yeah, letting us ..., letting them come in; and then, hoping there'll be a big concentration of boats coming in, and then they would "let loose." They had already triangulated and spotted, here off these beaches.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Sure.

ROBERT SHEEKS: So, I came in, I would say, maybe like about 4th wave on Red Beach 1, which was a northernmost beach. Unfortunately, the lead boat misled the 6th Marines too far north by about 4- or 500-yards; and later, they had to fall back. And that's where, incidentally, the big Bonsai Charge occurred; and so, they took the full brunt of that on Red Beach 1. But I came in about Red Beach 1, near Red Beach 2, in the early afternoon (or, about mid-day, I think it was), and then they were firing over us, and knocking-out amphibian tractors and boats. And then there was quite a lot of beach mortar fire that we were taking.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: In the National Park Service film we watched last night, they showed some actual footage of a landing craft just getting ..., just fire laying-down-on-them, and it was just water geysers, and things exploding. Was that the image you recall?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, quite a bit of that happened before I arrived, and there was enough boats and Amtraks already in, and more coming, so that it wasn't such a large percentage being hit. And, I was very lucky; got on to the beach without difficulty; but, just coming up on the sand when some Marines who had made it

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earlier, and were and were in kind-of an enlarged hole (not foxhole—bigger than a foxhole) took a direct hit with a mortar, and disappeared. It was just smoke! You couldn't see anything. I mean, it was a total evaporation.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You know, during any time during this terror war over Saipan actions, did you think, "This is it. I'm not gonna make it?" Did you have time to think about that kind of stuff?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, there's a great deal of fear, and a tight knot in your stomach, but you never feel that you're going to get it. Ha, ha.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: It's always going to be the other guy?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, you don't even think about that. You really think about what needs to be done, and that probably saves one's sanity; because there's a lot to do, and you keep pretty busy, and it's at night when it's worse.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Why's that?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, first place, you're dead-tired. You can't sleep properly, and you're staying awake for safety's sake, and it's harder to be brave at 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m. than it is at 10:00 a.m. And, we were being fired, and people were being hurt, and there was screaming and there was yelling for corpsman; and then, we were asked—everybody was asked—to help drag people to safety, and so on. And, it's ... I think that under those circumstances you think, you know, you may well not survive until morning. But once the sun comes up you feel better.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Now you had a small cadre of people you worked with, correct?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes. I worked in the context of the 2nd Marine Division Intelligence section.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you set up a CP in the [UNDECIPHERABLE] ...?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, I didn't, personally, but the D-2 Section was set up very near the Division General's headquarters' CP, and that was just in from Red Beach 1

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and 2, and General Watson came in that evening, and he was right ... I mean, the Marine tradition, especially 2nd Marine Division is, “Follow Me.” It isn’t, “Forward Men, I’ll be there soon, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I’m right behind you.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Right. Right behind you! I mean the Generals took terrible chances. They were right in there with everybody else.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When did your job actually start? When did you actually start going out in the field and to Japanese, and when did you arrange for these leaflets to be dropped in? What was the whole ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... schedule?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, the leaflet drops were not really done until about two days, three days later, because we used the artillery spotting planes to do the leaflet drops. But we started to get some prisoners almost immediately—wounded soldiers, and some civilians—and so I started talking to them the second day; well, the first full day.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What were you finding out from them?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Kind of miscellaneous stuff. I would try to find out whether they knew anything about bunkers; where they were located, and what their fields of fire were. That was what we were most interested in, and ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Were they able to give you some of that information?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes. Some of them said yes, that “right ..., you have to go here, here, and there’s a big place; and there’s a bunch of soldiers there, and so forth.”

DANIEL MARTINEZ: For those of us outside this realm of World War II history, we know that when our prisoners were captured, they were suppose to give, “name, rank, and serial number,” and not divulge any military intelligence, according to the Geneva Convention.

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ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How was a Japanese soldier different?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh, that's a wonderful question. They were so different because there had been no Japanese has been captured! And if you were ever to give up, you would not be Japanese anymore. And, so they couldn't at the same time say, "Now just in case you are captured, only give you name, rank and serial number." They couldn't do the two. And that's why when we got the Guadalcanal prisoners, and then the Navy picked up people from sea and so on, and I was interrogating them in New Caledonia, it was quite easy to get information. But in the case of the Navy people, we separated them so that they couldn't agree on a story--sort of like detective work, and I had the help of a Nisei there, which was very good. And I would pretend I'm a proper military officer; and the Nisei would be like a Sergeant; and the person would come in and he would shout in Japanese, "Attention," you know;" and then I would start with, "name, rank and serial number," but then go on from there. And then, "your unit, you know; where were you trained; and what was your function;" and you know, it all came tumbling out, and ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That sort of structure they could identify with?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, you know ... [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: It was pretty much a charade that you were talking about. You created this ..., this ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: That was, of course, a more formal thing, in a prisoner of war camp, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right.

ROBERT SHEEKS: But, ... [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was it like in the field?

ROBERT SHEEKS: In the field it was a little different. Sometimes you were hiding with them from the firing from both sides. And if you had rescued the people, you

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know, and give them a cigarette or chocolate bar, and say, “Look, we’re going to get you safely over to camp.” First thing they wanted was water. Our biggest ally in some sense was, it was very hot and dry in the middle of June that year, and ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: It’s pretty dry right now! Ha, ha, ha.

ROBERT SHEEKS: I mean, but now there’s a water supply; but then there wasn’t any, and some of the prized possessions were just a beer bottle, where they could, you know, get some water and carry it. And when we would find refuge areas of theirs, one of the things we did—it’s cruel, but [INDICIPHERABLE] water containers and the corrugated iron for catching water an so forth, and people were dying of thirst in many cases. And so first thing they wanted was water, and so ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That was a bargaining chip [OVERLAPPING] ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, not exactly, but it was a way of establishing that we had concern for them. “Here, look, drink some water. You need some bandages; and you know, how about a little food or cigarette?”

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So this compassion that you would show them would loosen—make them comfortable—to speak to you?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah. Not all of them. Some were “tough nuts,” you know, and we captured them because they were wounded, and they wanted to be killed; and one fellow, especially, said he wanted us to shoot him. And we said—what I said is, “No, you can die. No objection to your dying, but first you’ve got to dig your grave. So we gave him one of these little trenching tools. And he dug the ..., started, you know; and then said [SOUNDS LIKE] “Gurundi, you’re getting a little tired;” and then, give him a cigarette. And then I’d say, “It’s not deep enough.” You know, and it’s very tough, because it’s mostly coral [SOUNDS LIKE] rock over there, you know. And then, he’d sweat; and then he’d wait for a while, you know; and then he’d go back to work again.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Amazing.

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ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, and so ..

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you distracted him?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, I just, you know, wore him out digging his grave. “We’re gonna help you do what you want, but look, you’ve got to do your part.” Finally he got the idea, ha, ha, you know, and there were some others who had been in captured in the camp and they spoke with him, and then ... But he was very, very proud, you know, and so he was ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Was he an officer or an enlisted man?

ROBERT SHEEKS: I think he was, maybe, a ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Sergeant?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, kind of Warrant Officer, and so forth. And right to the end he was arrogant as Hell, but he went to the camp, and he survived.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Incredible. [OVERLAPPING]

ROBERT SHEEKS: I wasn’t gonna shoot him.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What would be a ..., and speak to me in Japanese. What would be a typical greeting or something that you might say to them in Japanese, if you know there was someone out there, and you wanted to make contact with them?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, the simplest thing, which we told everybody to say is a kind of a command to come out, “lite koe.” It’s not very polite. You know, you would normally say, “Kudasai mas,” you know, “Please come out.” We didn’t do that. We just gave the imperative, you know, “Come on out.” And, well just all the normal things, ha, you would have to say.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Was there, besides that, was there something about, “Come out unarmed,” or ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, [SOUNDS LIKE] “Te o ame ti et.” That means, “Raise your hands.” You know, come out raising your hands.

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: Was there also a phrase that, “You won’t be harmed,” or [OVERLAPPING] ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh, yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... did you get a chance to say any of that to them?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh sure. We had all those phrases. “You will be safe,” and so on. But mostly, it was, you know, “Show yourself. Raise your hands. We will not shoot you.”

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How many prisoners did you get in those first few days?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, I don’t really like to call everybody a prisoner. A lot of people, really, were refugees. And there are people who think that they capturing prisoners. They were just bringing in people who were giving up.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well, you know Bob, ... [OVERLAPPING]

ROBERT SHEEKS: Real prisoners, who were resisting and so on, I suppose, maybe, I brought in twenty, thirty; but of the other type, who were on the verge of giving up, and maybe were talked out of resisting any further, perhaps a couple of hundred, something like that. And but refugees, there were thousands.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: One of the things I think is most misleading, and if we’re not able speak to individuals like you; is you see photographs of so-called “prisoners,” and you made it abundantly clear that these people were dressed in uniforms because that was their clothing, and for a variety of reasons, there was also ..., the Japanese had the idea that populous here was supposed to be like a “People’s Army.”

ROBERT SHEEKS: That’s right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Can you elaborate a little more about that?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes. Well once the war was going badly for the Japanese, [INDISCIPHERABLE] was not well supplied with consumer goods, you know. They didn’t have very much clothes they owned. So the labor troops were issued khaki clothing. And the bush is very rough, it’s Pandanas Screw Pines, you know, and that

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kind of thing; lots of coral around; so, a lot of them used these pattines, you know, those wrappings around the leg, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Like leggings.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Leggings, yeah. And then, if there were discarded military jackets or caps, you know, kids and men wore them; even women wore discarded military clothing, because it was better than the stuff they had. So, it was to their disadvantage. When we ..., after we realized that here in [SOUNDS LIKE] Fort Tinian, I had leaflets dropped, telling all the people to wear white. And I have some photos of people. And when we finally got there and things were calmed-down, we had whole columns of people along the road, all wearing white clothes, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So that information was getting through.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, it got through at Tinian, but we didn't realize it, that they might be wearing a military colored clothing. And then some people probably took, during the campaign, even took clothing off of dead soldiers, just to have some kind of garments.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [INDISCIPHERABLE]

ROBERT SHEEKS: No, no I mean ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Oh, just garments to wear.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... to wear. And this, when it's khaki colored you know. All of our boys thought, "Well hey, these are troops."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How was Saipan different than Tarawa in your view?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Well, in most ways it's totally different. Tarawa, physically, is a little low atoll. I think the highest point was about six feet above sea level. It was a coconut-studded little place, and it was ..., the whole thing was a fort. The Japanese thought a million men couldn't take it. And I can see why they thought that. And it was just a hot, firefighting end, and then it was over. Here, we have a high island. It went on for weeks. And then after it was declared taken (around July 9th—something

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like that), I told Colonel Tom Connelly, the D-2 of our division; I said, “You know, I think there are a lot of Japanese still up in the hills.” And he told the D-3, the Operations Chief, Colonel David Shoup (who later became Commandant of the Marine Corps) what I said. So I was called in, and he was skeptical. He said, “Well, how many have you seen?” I said, “Well, I’ve seen several here, and several there,” and he said, “Well, maybe there are several ...;” because, it seemed as if our three divisions had marched, shoulder-to-shoulder, from one end of the island to the other end of the island. How could there be anybody left?

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Was that, in fact a reality, that we had one that?

ROBERT SHEEKS: No, it was a totally unreal thing, and how so many people escaped detection, I don’t know. I was asked to put in as estimate. I said, three-, to five-hundred left. And I think we got out something like seven thousand, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Is that right?

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... I mean there were thousands of people who hadn’t been found—in caves; or at night, they had infiltrated back and hidden behind our lines; and we weren’t all that eager to go into every nook and cranny of the whole mountain.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That terrain over there, which I’ve seen, is very advantageous to people that want to hide, because of the caves and the very structure of the island on that north end.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes. Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Dan you shed some light. There was one thing that we mentioned before we got in here, and you wanted to set the record straight on, and that has to do with the people that surrendered.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Do you mean ..., we mentioned a couple of things when we were chatting; one was about the number of suicides?

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Yes. Yes, that’s what I’m getting at.

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ROBERT SHEEKS: Oh, I see. Yeah. Well, if you see a hundred people jumping off cliffs, and a dozen families with the little kids, you know, jumping off cliffs, you really think the world's coming to an end. I mean, it was so dramatic and so moving. But it can easily give you a misimpression, and ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Especially when it's captured on film, and shown to ...

ROBERT SHEEKS: That's right. And then, we had a lot of photography going on, and we had an outstanding combat correspondent who worked for Time Magazine, Bob Sharrad, who wrote a major article for Time, which was questioning whether all of the Japanese in Japan would be committing suicide if we were to invade.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Do you think that that article by Mr. Sharrad had an influence on the decision to drop the bomb?

ROBERT SHEEKS: I do. I happen to think so, but by the time was dropped, we had already taken Okinawa, and it was clear that everybody in Okinawa was committing suicide. And the number of suicides here, I think, was in the few hundreds (I mean, the ones jumping off the cliffs). It certainly wasn't thousands, and we had thousands who didn't jump off. So I think it was a bit sensationalized, and, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Exaggerated.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... exaggerated, but it did, I think, have a big impact on the American public, including policymakers, thinking that probably, we would run into tremendous resistance in Japan, which I think would have been the case. I mean, they'd have fought the way they did here! And, it would, I think, have meant maybe a million American lives? Who knows? So, the decision to drop the bomb, I think certainly was based partly on this conviction that the Japanese would fight to the death to—at least the military. But weather ..., how the decision was made to drop it on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is of course, another complicated issue. I understand that was one of the first targets that was considered, but Langdon Warner, the Harvard, Asian Historian an Art Curator, I think played an important role in

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Washington, saying, “Don’t destroy the cultural capital of Japan just to show them—show the Emperor something; that it’s a cultural resource of the world, and it should not be ..., hit a military target or something. But there are people who think we should have had a “demonstration place.” But anyhow, the decision was made, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And that debate is going to be a very interesting and “hot issue” next year, when we observe the 50th Anniversary of the ending of the war.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: This myth—rather, not so much this myth—but this over exaggeration of the suicides that took place (although they did take place in the hundreds), is that perpetuated in any of the monuments out there? It says that thousands, literally ... [OVERLAPPING]

ROBERT SHEEKS: No, no. I misspoke. It doesn’t say that, but the fact that there are monuments there, and that this scene is repeated over-and-over again, I think gives the impression that Saipan was a place of mass suicide, which it never was. There were a lot of people who did kill themselves; but when we say a lot, you know, a few hundred is a lot. But it wasn’t thousands.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Wasn’t this the, kind of a, first example of this, though, in the Pacific War, that we saw, was here at Saipan, of the populous doing that?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes, I think so, ... [OVERLAPPING]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: It was shocking, I think, [OVERLAPPING] to the American Public.

ROBERT SHEEKS: ... because this is this first place that we came that there was a resident, civilian population. Now in Guadalcanal, and even at Tarawa, soldiers killed themselves. And one of the favorite methods, and often photographed, was you know, put a rifle “here,” and then pull the trigger with your toe. And so you’d see these pictures, ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: They’re rather dramatic, ...

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ROBERT SHEEKS: Dramatic.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ... but, here's an example of non-combatants doing that, and I think of what it ..., it still is shocking to a lot of people, as it was to point out that this did not take place in the overall populace because there was, what, over seven thousand that you had ...?

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yeah, there were thousands already in the stockade at the time that these suicides were occurring, and I think the suicides occurred for several reasons. One is, they were so fearful of the Americans. They had been told many, many stories. And I got these stories. They'd say, "The favorite American method is to make you lie down on the ground, and roll over you with the tanks." That was a story widely-circulated by the Japanese, to keep their people from [OVERLAPPING] [INDISCIPHERABLE] ...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Terrible. Terrible. A terrible prospect for them.

ROBERT SHEEKS: Yes. Then, women thought they were going to be raped and brutalized and so on. And then, there were some who probably were ...

[END VIDEO]